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ROBERTO AGUIRRE-SACASA • CLAYTON CRAIN

The Sensational SPIDER-MAN®

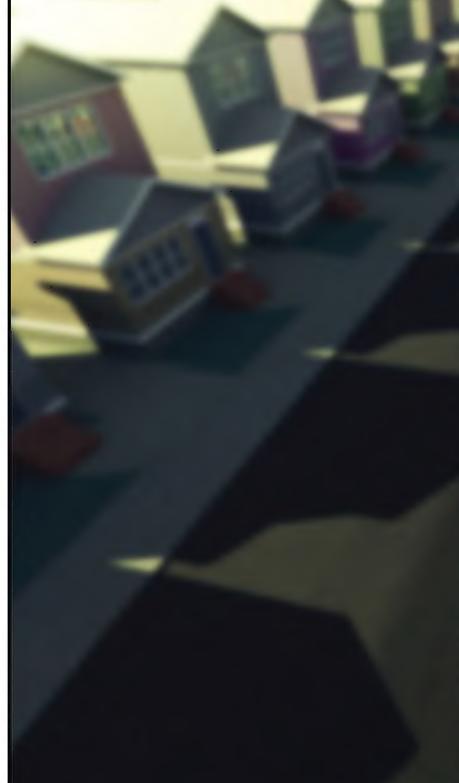
BACK IN BLACK



-Crain-

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ONCE, THERE WAS A BOY FROM THE BOROUGH OF QUEENS, IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK, WHOSE NAME WAS PETER.



AND THIS BOY WAS BLAMELESS AND UPRIGHT, WITH A GOOD HEART, WHO NEVER TURNED TOWARD EVIL.



DESPITE AN EARLY TRAGEDY HE DIDN'T REMEMBER, IT SEEMED AS IF THERE WERE A PROTECTIVE WALL AROUND HIM AND HIS HOUSE, HIS UNCLE AND HIS AUNT, ON EVERY SIDE.



EXCEPT WHEN PETER WAS AWAY FROM HOME, AT SCHOOL, BUT THEN...

HEY,
PARKER,
HUNGRY? EAT
FLOOR,
DWEEB!

...AS IT HAS BEEN IN HIGH SCHOOL, SO IT WILL EVER BE.

THE BOY BORE THESE DAILY HUMILIATIONS BRAVELY, NEVER LETTING THEM TAINT HIS SOUL.

AND FOR
WHATEVER
REASON...



...HIS BELIEF THAT THE WORLD
WAS BASICALLY A GOOD PLACE
NEVER WAVERED.

ARE YOU ALL
RIGHT, PETER? THAT
FLASH IS SUCH A DOLT!
HERE, LET ME HELP
YOU UP.



OR BLESSED HIM, THOUGH THAT DEPENDS ON WHO'S TELLING THIS STORY. AND, IN THE END, WHICH SIDE--GOOD OR EVIL--WINS.



ONE THING WAS CERTAIN, THOUGH...

FROM THAT FATEFUL DAY ON, IT WAS AS IF A DARK CLOUD SETTLED OVER PETER PARKER...



A MOMENT OF TRUTH:

WHA--?!!

YOU'RE NOT GOING ANYWHERE, MURDERER!

OHMYGOD--
YOU! THE MAN I HAD
A CHANCE TO STOP
BUT DIDN'T!

WHAT ARE
YOU TALKING
ABOUT, FREAK?
IF YER GONNA KILL
ME, KILL ME AND
GET IT OVER
WITH!

WHO CAN SAY WHAT A WEAKER PERSON WOULD'VE DONE... TURNED FROM GOODNESS? CURSED THE HEAVENS? FORSAKEN EVERYTHING HONORABLE AND DECENT IN THE WORLD? POSSIBLY...

...BUT NOT
PETER PARKER.

WELL,
WOULDYA LOOK AT THAT! GIFT-WRAPPED,
AND IT AINT EVEN
CHRISTMAS!!



DEVASTATING AS IT WAS,
HIS UNCLE'S DEATH WAS
ONLY THE FIRST OF MANY
TRAILS PETER WOULD
ENDURE OVER THE YEARS...

...DUST
TO DUST...
...ASHES
TO ASHES...

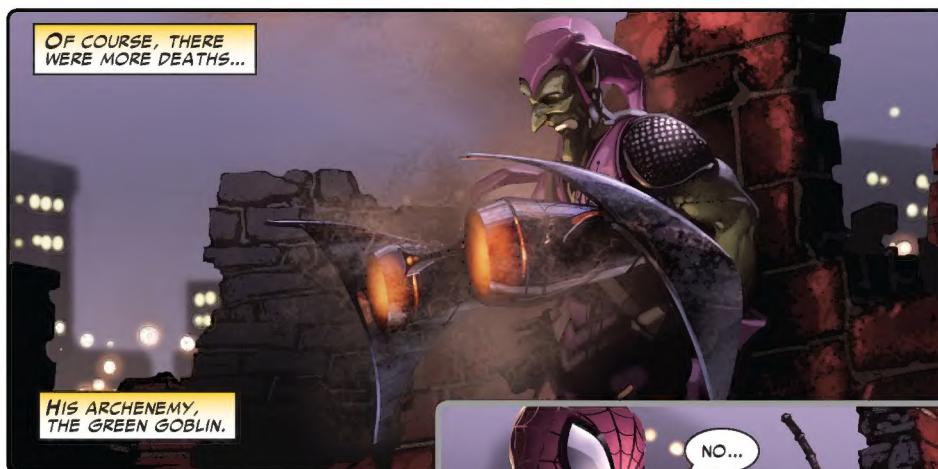


I'M SO
SORRY, UNCLE
BEN, AND I
SWEAR--

--I WON'T
EVER LET ANYONE
ELSE DIE BECAUSE
OF ME.

OF COURSE, THERE
WERE MORE DEATHS...

HIS ARCHENEMY,
THE GREEN GOBLIN.



NO-
NO-
NO-

HIS FIRST,
AND SOME SAY
TRUEST LOVE,
GWEN STACY.

AND ON AND ON,
TO THE PRESENT...



...TO HIS AUNT MAY, WHO LIES IN A HOSPITAL BED, BARELY HANGING ON.

PETER...?

HUH?

YOU WERE TALKING TO YOURSELF, JUST NOW.

YOU WERE REPEATING..."NO," IT SOUNDED LIKE.

I WAS?
YEAH, I GUESS I WAS...

PETER, ARE YOU--

--YOU OKAY, TIGER? I MEAN, ALL THINGS CONSIDERED?

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED?

NO, MARY JANE, I DON'T THINK I AM...

"...I DON'T THINK I'VE
BEEN OKAY FOR A
LONG TIME NOW..."

"PETER, WAIT--
WHERE ARE YOU
GOING?"

"TO BLOW OFF
SOME STEAM, MJ. TO
HURT SOMETHING."





CLANGG!



CLANGG!



CLANGG!



CLANGG!



UH--!









YOU...YOU
SNUCK UP ON ME
AND MY SPIDER-SENSE
DIDN'T GO OFF...

WHO ARE
YOU?



C'MON,
PETER.

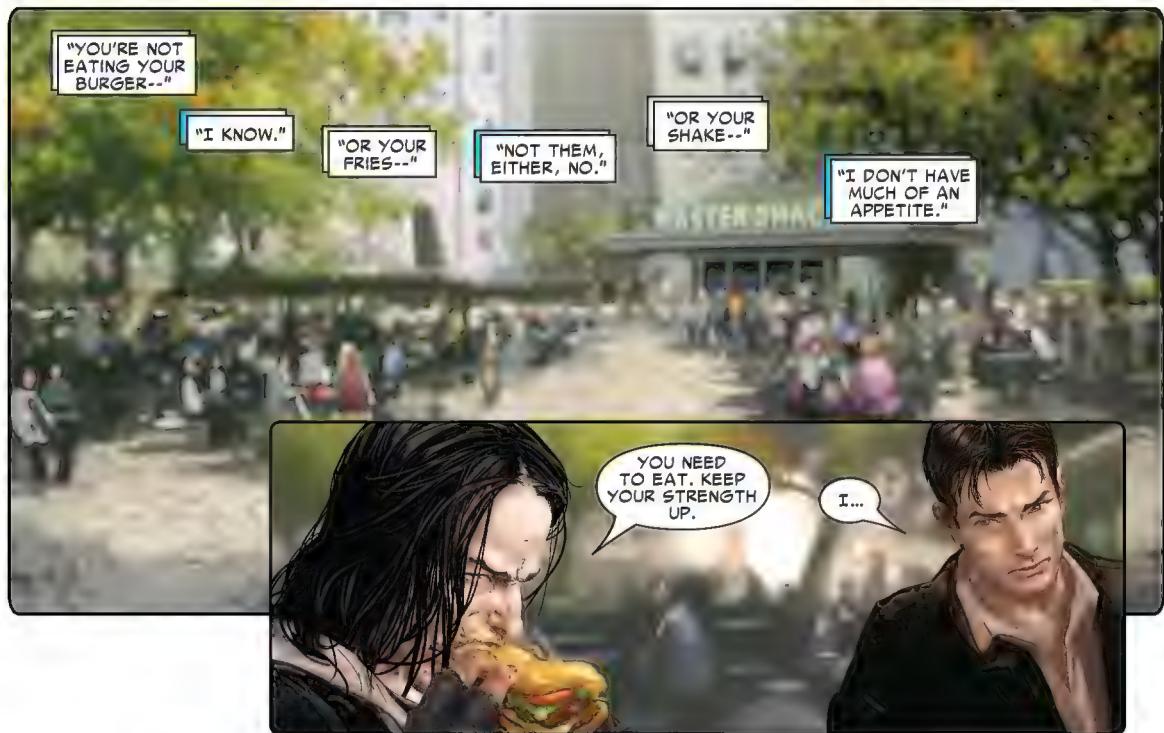
YOU
KNOW WHO
I AM.



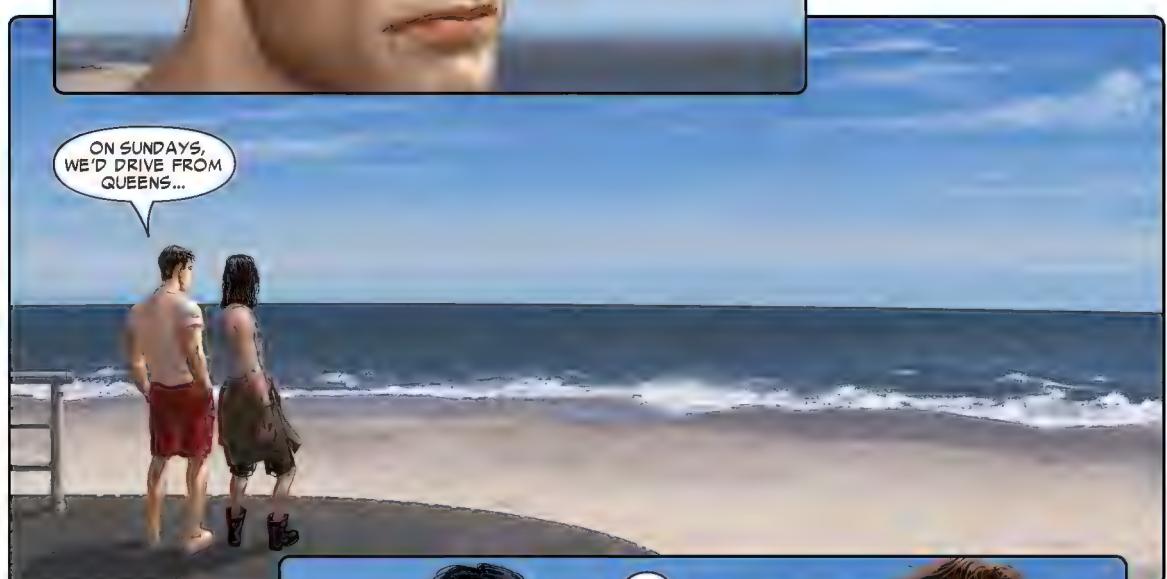
YE...YES.



ALL
RIGHTY,
THEN.
LUNCH?
SOME FOOD?
MY TREAT?







DID I DO SOMETHING BAD TO DESERVE THIS?
IS BEING SPIDER-MAN PUNISHMENT FOR SOME **WRONG** I COMMITTED IN A PAST LIFE?

NO.
NO, NOT AT ALL.

OKAY, SO IS IT A **TEST**? BECAUSE IF I'M BEING TESTED, THEN LET ME FAIL.
BECAUSE I HAVE TO TELL YOU... I'M **THIS** CLOSE TO BREAKING.

IT'S NOT A TEST, IT JUST...IS.

OKAY, THEN CAN YOU EXPLAIN IT, AT LEAST? CAN YOU HELP ME UNDERSTAND, YOU KNOW--

--WHY?

OH, PETER. PETER, PETER,
PETER.
HUMAN SUFFERING IS ONE OF THE MYSTERIES...

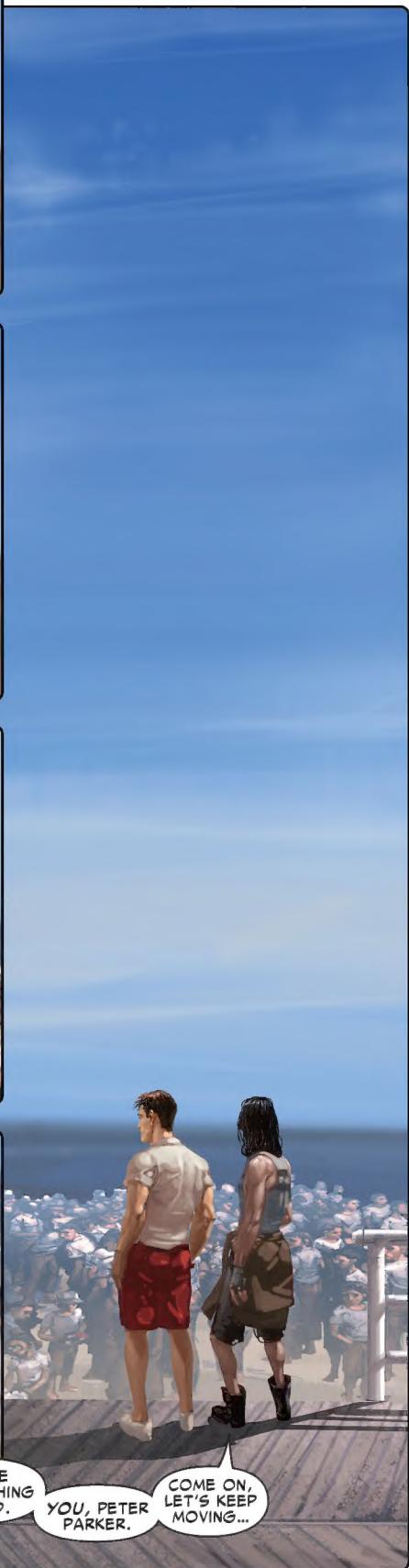
IT HAPPENS, FOR NO GOOD REASON. AND THE PEOPLE WHO ENDURE IT...

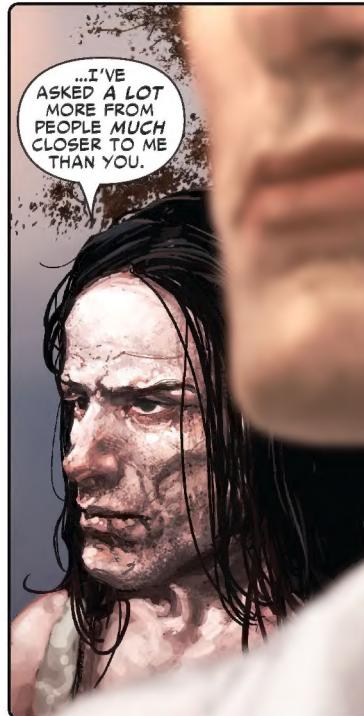
IT DOESN'T EVEN ALWAYS MAKE THEM **BETTER**. (YOU'RE ONE OF THE RARE EXCEPTIONS.) USUALLY IT MAKES THEM WORSE...

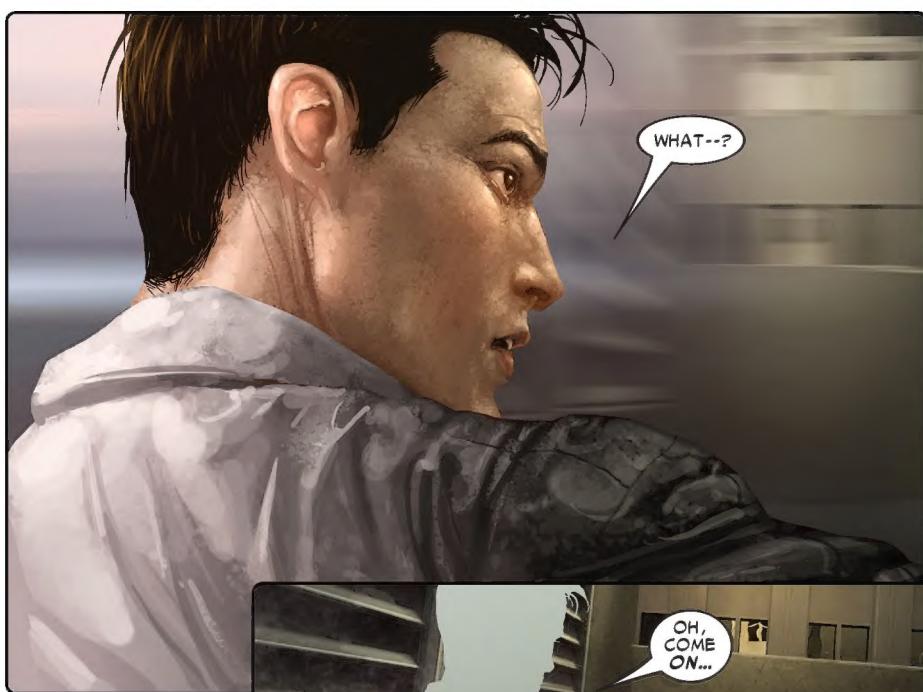
IT HAPPENS, THOUGH, TO EVERYONE.
WHAT'S THE POINT OF ANYTHING, THEN?
I MEAN, IF IT'S BEYOND UNDERSTANDING?

HARD TO EXPLAIN WHY IT'S **NECESSARY** TO SOMEONE WHO WASN'T THERE WHEN THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH WAS LAID...OR WHEN THE FIRST WALLS WERE BUILT AROUND THE OCEANS...









...LET'S SAY THAT IT DOESN'T END HERE, IN AN ALLEY BEHIND A HOSPITAL IN NEW YORK CITY. LET'S SAY THAT IT ENDS MANY, MANY YEARS FROM NOW.

WITH THE MAN, PETER PARKER, AND HIS FAMILY SURVIVING WHATEVER HARDSHIPS COME THEIR WAY.

WITH PETER GROWING OLD AND WHITE-HAIRED ALONGSIDE THE WOMAN HE LOVES...

AND THEIR CHILDREN, BENJAMIN AND MARY...

LET'S SAY IT ENDS WITH ALL OF THEM BLESSED.

The Book of Peter